

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis & Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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Billy Graham

Much has been written, and said, about Billy Graham over the past two years. His tragic physical problems resulting from steroid abuse have been well-documented and should cause every professional and amateur athlete to think seriously about the consequences of steroid abuse. No one, however, delivers the message about steroid abuse better than Billy Graham himself. In this interview conducted by David Skolnick on January 9, 1992, Graham - whom Hulk Hogan once called his idol - discusses steroid abuse in professional wrestling, Hulk Hogan, Vince McMahon and the ramifications of steroid abuse.

Wrestling Perspective: You were quiet for so long. Why are you coming forward now?
Billy Graham: I was quiet. In February 1990, I had my ankle operated on. My right ankle was fused. At that time, I decided to make my own injuries known publicly to the country about what steroids had done. I just felt that it was time to let people know, enlighten people on the real physical hazards of steroids. So I went public then, but I did not name names. My quotes of 90 percent of wrestlers in the WWF taking steroids, that was low. I should have said 98 or 99 percent. That would have been a truer assessment. I just made those public announcements about myself and there was a huge amount, 90 percent, of the boys taking it, but I named no names. I said, "Let everyone else stand up and be accounted for themselves." Until this *Arsenio Hall Show* thing, which I believe it was July 18th it aired. That's the exact air date I believe. When the Hulk came out and blatantly denied ever using steroids except for therapeutic, maybe two or three times for therapeutic usage on a bicep tear.

WP: Which many people said was non-existent.

BG: Non-existent. I've been talking to Dave Meltzer, who is a great wrestling historian, and other people, and nowhere in their knowledge can they find that he ever tore a bicep or had been out. When you tear a bicep, you're out for two or three or four months. Sid Justice just tore a bicep and he's been out for four months and he's just coming back now. There's no gap in his (Hogan's) wrestling schedule in '83 or '84 and no record of a bicep tear. So that was just strictly a blatant lie. The point I'm stressing is that not only does the Hulk lie blatantly to the country, but that lie was originated and organized and orchestrated in Titan Sports in Vince McMahon's office, because nothing is ever done on a television show with the Hulk, or anyone else, unless it's run by Vince's office. They were in such a spot at the Zahorian trial and everything, they had to make a stand. So it's a company lie. Not only did Hulk Hogan personally deliver the lie, but the roots trace back to the company. It's a pre-organized, pre-determined, pre-meditated insidious lie to the children of this country, to the kids of this country. So it's a Titan Sports, World Wrestling Federation lie, along with a Hulk Hogan lie.

WP: So you're saying the whole thing was orchestrated to cover up the bad press?

BG: Yes. There's millions of dollars worth of merchandise involved here. It's a tremendous commercially... things could be threatened. That's why they covered it up.

They covered it up for dollars and cents. It was the most disgusting thing I'd ever seen or heard. When he mentioned my name, he said I was a steroid abuser. That didn't bother me so much, because that's true. I am. I'm admitting it. I know what I am. But the horrible, sickening part was him denying ever using steroids. That is what shocked me into going public and now I'm doing that. It's been five full months that I've been wrestling with this problem of whether I should do it or whether I shouldn't. So I just weighed everything and came to the conclusion that I've got to speak out since this guy is not man enough to speak out for himself. I've got to speak out. I conferred with David Shults and we both agreed to speak out simultaneously. That was just too much to take. That type of insidious lie. It was too much to handle. Like I said the other night on the radio, "When you lie to kids about drugs, and steroids are drugs, you lie to kids about drugs, that's the same thing as child abuse. It's a form of child abuse." I just couldn't hold back anymore. I had to go public with this thing.

WP: What do you want him to do regarding steroids?

BG: I've made the statement that he and Vince McMahon have got to go on a nationally televised show, not a small show that nobody's watching, but a national show like an *Arsenio Hall Show* or *Donahue* or someone or even call a press conference and publicly apologize for this lie. What I'm doing, I'm trying to organize a boycott. I'm trying to organize a national boycott of WWF pay-per-view events, all merchandise and free TV. I'm not alone in my efforts or my convictions. I have a little statement I want to read you from *Good Housekeeping's* January issue: Headline is "Wrestling: Good or Bad for Kids?" "Why do kids love professional wrestling so much? Most parents can't even begin to understand the attraction. The action isn't always real, kids can tell when fake fighting is going on, and wrestlers muscles are so over inflated it's hard to take them or the sport seriously. While fans say wrestling is good, clean fun, many others believe it's a bad influence on kids. Here's why in three points: First, the drug connection. Because so many wrestlers are pumped up on steroids, fans may think it's okay to use these drugs. Two, no true competition. The outcome of many matches is pre-determined, which may lead kids to believe that's the case with all sporting competitions. Third, and last point, fighting dirty. Many wrestlers ignore referees, hit from behind and do all sorts of things parents teach their kids not to do. With all these negatives, it's time to change the channel." And you can add the fourth negative, the mega-star, the hero of every kid in this country, is blatantly lying to the kids that worship him. That's another reason they should turn the channel. I believe with all my heart, they should be boycotted until they go public with a public apology. Then it will be up to the people themselves to make up their own minds if they want to continue supporting wrestling and the WWF. That's my stand on that.

WP: When was the last time you spoke to Hogan?

BG: The last time I spoke to Hogan was in '88. I had my hip operation, my hip replacement in October '86. I made my comeback in '87 and then started managing Muraco in '88. I also did commentary in '88. My ankles were so bad in '89 that I had to get off the road and I stopped. The last I spoke with him was '88. In '87, I gave him three, I know absolutely for a fact, I injected the man three times with steroids. One was in the Pontiac Silverdome, Pontiac, Michigan. The second one was in Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis and the third in the Cow Palace in San Francisco. I personally injected the man in '87 on three different occasions myself. We would have many discussions and he would laugh about his steroid usage. The first year, he took a shot almost every day for a year before he learned how to cycle. He would laugh about how uninformed he was in the early years. He took a shot every day for a year. The result of that he received a tennis ball scar tissue in his hip, like the one Lyle Alzado had one cut out. He said that his was as big as canteloupe. That scar tissue was from repeated injections from syringes.

WP: When you were there in '87, he would say in interviews that this is the man that I idolized. He saw how big you were and he must have known you were taking steroids. Do you feel responsible that maybe you were the reason he did this?

BG: No, because he wanted to. In late '76, early '77, I met Terry Bollea in Tampa. He was just a fan in Tampa trying to get into the wrestling business and even then he would approach me and ask me about steroids. He was investigating. He wanted to know what brands worked the best and in what combination got the best effect. He was well on his way. I didn't give him any answers. He was complaining he was unable to break-in in Tampa at that time. For some reason, they didn't want him to be in the business. He felt he was being neglected. But obviously he eventually did get in. I was his idol. I was a mentor to him. There's no question about that. But, whether I influenced his steroid taking, I can't say I was the sole inspiration because he wanted to be the biggest person he could be for his future in wrestling.

WP: *So that was the first time you met him, down in Tampa?*

BG: Yeah, in Tampa, late '76, early '77.

WP: *What was the next time?*

BG: Off and on in Minnesota. He got his career going and I saw him in Atlanta. We crossed paths in Atlanta in '79. In '82, in Minnesota, we were together wrestling. That's when David Shults and I were there with the Hulk in Minnesota in '82. I was there for approximately six to eight months with him there and then again in '86, '87, '88 and early '89 before I stopped.

WP: *If he does come clean, what will that accomplish?*

BG: I tell you, if he came clean now, at least it would show that he's got to face reality. You've got to face the truth and you will not get away with lies to kids about drugs in this country. I compare him to Marion Barry, the Washington, D.C. former mayor who got popped for crack. He would talk in schools and tell them not to do drugs and at the same time, he had drugs in his pocket. It's the same thing. Here he is going across the country saying he doesn't take drugs and at the same time, he is taking them. It would force him to admit he was lying to kids so people would know the absolute truth. Now what's going to happen is it's going to grow and grow and grow. The more he continues to deny, if he does it tomorrow on that Regis Philbin show, if he doesn't admit, if it's more of a smear tactic against me and Shults, then it's going to snowball. *20/20* is knocking on his door. We're going to tape at the end of the month with *20/20*. They're going to air that thing in February. There's possibly a *Donahue* in the works, *Oprah* in the works and all the radio shows and newspapers up and down this country. It's going to intensify. You can't get away with it. The issue is even if he does apologize - which I hope he does because he owes it to this country to do it - it would be a pathetic thing also because the only reason he is apologizing is he got caught. If he wouldn't have gotten caught and his hand wouldn't have been called on this, he would have never apologized. You have a moral, ethical issue. He just has to tell the truth. He can't get away with lying to this country about drugs, especially with kids involved.

WP: *You're saying that the WWF is responsible for a lot of this. Is their steroid policy just a PR play?*

BG: Their steroid policy, their first test was eight weeks ago and the *Entertainment Tonight* piece came out and the *Inside Edition* the next night. That was their first steroid test and because of all that media publicity on them, Vince McMahon had a press conference and publicly said that they will have the best steroid testing system in professional sports. Better than the NFL. They will be the trendsetters. They will be the leaders. Well here it is eight weeks since they first tested and we haven't heard of the results. We haven't heard if anyone failed. We haven't heard if there's going to be sanctions against these people, fines or anything else, suspensions of any kind. We haven't heard if he has a rehab program set up for people who are on steroids and plan on getting off. Those things haven't been mentioned. I don't know if you know or not, but the NFL tests every Sunday randomly its players and whoever got popped, their names were made public. So here's a guys saying he's going to lead the country in steroid testing and hasn't released

any results yet. So it's strictly a PR thing. I've even heard that a lot of the wrestlers are saying that they don't want to stop taking steroids. They're psychologically addicted. They're psychologically addicted and they don't want to shrink up 30 or 40 pounds. They don't want to lose that aggressiveness and everything. They're going to band together and he can't fire the whole crew. There's talk about that. There's talk that three of the top people did not take the first test because they said when they went in that in their contracts, they couldn't be tested for steroids. That was the agreement they made with Vince. The steroid testing thing is a PR play, no questions about it. We've seen no results yet. We don't know when the next one is. I heard they might of tested the night before in Daytona Beach, Tuesday night. But I haven't heard anything concrete on that yet. So it's strictly PR.

WP: I assume, Alzado, Zahorian and yourself, the controversy surrounding all three of those issues brought this testing to the forefront.

BG: Exactly. The Zahorian trial and they kind of weathered that. Then when Alzado came public, it was too much. Their hand was forced. There was too much publicity. They were forced to do it.

WP: How did you yourself get involved with steroids?

BG: I've been clean now for two and half years. I just started taking steroids in the late sixties, early seventies in Arizona, power-lifting and bodybuilding and it was just so open. It was a new wonder drug. You could get it from any doctor. It was very accessible and there was no restraint on it. It was like a new wonder drug and it was the thing to do. It was so easily accessible and it wasn't against the law to purchase it or use it. It was just there. People did it. It was a wonder drug that people experimented with and had no idea what it would do down the line.

WP: Did you have any types of side effects at first?

BG: No, other than high blood pressure. I did end up with liver damage. I ended up with sterility problems and then of course my bone joint disease took quite a while to develop. In the beginning, I had no problems, other than a little bit of liver damage. I had it checked in the early eighties, but I didn't know there was anything going wrong with me. It was a slow process. You felt so good. Steroids have an anti-inflammatory agent in them that masks muscle bone joint pain. It masks that pain. So you feel really great and feel so strong, so powerful, so muscular, you're so reved up, you're so psyched, you're so aggressive. You're moods are altered so much, you don't think anything can phase you. You feel so invincible. You never even thought of problems. We heard of a few little stories about a guy having liver problems, but we just kind of shined it off. We thought, "Well, they probably got these test results and said you're going to get liver damage or be sterile because they gave a rat in a laboratory 100 times the normal dosage." Lo and behold, years later, we end up taking 100 times the normal dosage in some cases. Some people taking 200 times the prescribed dosage. So at the time, no, we didn't have a clue.

WP: You've used them for 20, 25 years.

BG: Yeah, two full decades.

WP: Would you say that your fame in wrestling was due to steroids?

BG: Obviously, I had one of the early physiques that stood out. No question about that. I believe if I wasn't on steroids and had a normal, good physique, that my charisma and flamboyancy and the whole package would have exalted me where I was anyway. I would have still been, even without the exceptional size and shape I had, I still would have been the appointed champion. I would have still been the colorful Superstar Billy Graham. It wouldn't have held me back.

WP: When do you think steroids became so prevalent in wrestling?

BG: In the early eighties, Vince, when his father died. I don't remember exactly when that was.

WP: I think it was '83.

BG: '83, yeah right about then, the kid started pushing heavy and the Hulk came on the scene and was so huge, that's what the kid wanted to go with. Of course, Zahorian was there with accessibility. It was really pushed. It started then and even continues now. Even though he says he's testing and he wants a steroid-free organization. I saw a couple of kids coming in. This Indian kid and you can tell these guys are steroided heavy. Nothing is changing.

WP: How did you get them back then?

BG: I started getting steroids from Zahorian and other drugs in 1977. Zahorian goes all the way back to 1977. I started with the World Wrestling Federation in 1975 and there were a few other doctors before Zahorian who prescribed steroids for you and when Zahorian come on the scene, it was like an open air market, a bazaar. He'd walk into the locker room and he had boxes, attache cases stuffed with steroids and other drugs. It was a cash and carry deal. Zahorian was the main supplier.

WP: Now that he's gone, they've still got them.

BG: Now that he's gone, it's strictly a black market thing. The reason a lot of guys didn't want to go to the black market is because a full third of the black market's steroids are counterfeit. All there is, is a little bit of sesame seed oil, sometimes they even put soap detergent in them. I've heard of that. A full third of them or 40 percent are counterfeit. People are taking a chance. You'll get burnt both ways. They're going to hurt you if they're good, they're going to hurt you if they're bad. Now that Zahorian is out of the picture, it's back to the streets, back to the black market.

WP: You said earlier that it was 90 percent, but it could have been 97 or 98 percent. When I spoke to Jim Duggan the other day, asking him about steroid abuse, he was saying that you were there three or four years ago and maybe back then 90 percent of the guys took it. But so many of those guys are gone. We've got a whole new crop of wrestlers in right now. Would you still stick by that high percentage?

BG: From observations, and I haven't been watching that much WWF wrestling as of late, other people that have feel it's still up there in the 90 percent range. Certainly, certain people don't take it and some are trying to go off now. At least go off before a test. But just general observations, I would have to say it's still up in the 90 percent bracket.

WP: Do you think Hogan is off?

BG: I think right now, he's off. I think since the trial, I saw him on time, he was obviously off because he looked 50 pounds lighter doing a promo than he was previously. At least a 50 pound body drop. He shrunk. He looked like a shell of his former self. I heard he'd gone back up a little bit and went down and back up. He's kind of fluctuating, but I haven't seen him in full month. But, yes, he's definitely off right now. A lot of people are making comments about it's so obvious, he's lost so much size and everything. How could he have been that big before and not be taking steroids. If he wasn't taking steroids, then why isn't he as big as he's always been?

WP: He's setting himself up for fall no matter what he does.

BG: I think so. I really do. About the 90 percent thing. To get back to that for a second. When I was there in '87, '88, the standard joke in the locker room was this was the only sport that if you did not test positive for steroids, you'd be fired. That was before they started testing for steroids of course. But that was the standard locker room joke. Now the joke is with Hulk and his vitamins. Sure he's selling vitamins. You get a choice of two: either oral or injectable. There's a lot of ill feeling out there. A lot of these people are not

ignorant. Here's a guy with 23 inch arms, 330 pounds, the biggest arms in the world he's claiming and the guy's never taken steroids. That's not even logical. Then compare that to the way he looks now. So there's your test. It's obvious.

WP: When I saw him on Arsenio, he tried to come off as sincere. Do you think he's convinced himself that maybe it isn't such a bad thing? He doesn't think there's anything wrong with it, but other people do?

BG: He was very nervous. Obviously, he tried to come off as being sincere. But most everyone saw through that because of his nervousness, because that was a pre-determined concocted lie that they came up with in order to salvage their merchandise and their marketing product. There was no sentimentality in that thing. That was a business decision to deny it. Now it may turn out to be a very bad business decision, because if they don't turn around and apologize to people and the stories keep on coming in, it will make them look worse and worse. They're going to get buried more and more. Especially not responding to pieces like *Inside Edition*.

WP: Do you think with all this negative publicity, the situation is going to improve?

BG: In the WWF, Vince, he has no choice if the publicity continues, but to actually start doing a fine or suspension to someone who tests positive. We're thinking he may do that if they did test in Florida the last couple of nights. They may throw a couple of sacrificial lambs like Barbarian, somebody like that. Someone who really wouldn't be missed on a card. So here's our first suspension and we're serious about this. I think it would be a token offering.

WP: It also sets them up potentially for someone who is suspended and eventually fired for more bad publicity. This person will say now that their career is ruined to say, "They forced me to do this." So it's a double-edged sword for them.

BG: It's a no win situation, that's right. Another problem is his World Bodybuilding Federation. They just ran some ads this week showing the new magazine and article on "Why Big Men Get The Women." So he's still pushing the biggest men get the women. What's this guy doing? He said he was going to test all these people. (Lou) Ferrigno made the big PR thing that's why he joined the World Bodybuilding Federation, because it was going to be a clean organization, steroid-free. I heard down here in Southern California, the guy weighs 290. He's a monster. There's just no way he's steroid free. We've never heard if they've been tested yet. We haven't heard any testing information for the WBF. I think he's really in a spot. I really do.

WP: Is he obsessed with big men and muscles?

BG: He's always been mesmerized by big men, big muscles, big bodies, powerful physiques. He's always been mesmerized by them. I think he still is. I think it will be a major problem for him to overcome it. I can't believe... if all the wrestlers have to go off steroids, they'll all lose 30, 40 pounds. Their physiques will be totally different. What are the fans going to think? How is the fan going to react to this? It's a dilemma. It really is. I believe it's a major, major behind the eight ball here. This situation here.

WP: You've got these young guys just starting out with them, just breaking in. They see all the guys on top are huge. To them, they're probably thinking, "Why shouldn't I not be using steroids, because I'm not going to get a push?" What would you say to them?

BG: They have no choice. You look at the guys that are getting the push and it's the big boys. They're not going to have any choice but to go ahead and use them to gain that size in order to gain the position of being pushed. They're in a predicament to. As a matter of fact, I talked to a kid here in Burbank in a cafeteria about a couple of months ago, back in the summer. He's a real big kid who works out in a local wrestling gym here. He told me he went to Wrestlemania here in L.A. and he actually had a chance to talk to Vince McMahon and he asked Vince, "Vince, I want to get into the World Wrestling Federation. How do I do it? What do I have to do?" And he said Vince pointed over at the Barbarian

and said, "You have to look like this to get in." That was a quote from this guy. That's the standard.

WP: So people either have the choice of doing it or not being involved in the business.

BG: There's guys in Atlanta who are planning to come up to the WWF and have confided in certain people that they've got to gain another 30 or 40 pounds before they go up. They've got to go on the juice. It's just there, man. It's the standard Vince set and he's obsessed with it. The whole testing thing is a sham and a PR thing. Only time will tell.

WP: As this country's most powerful wrestling promoter, he certainly has an obligation to crack down on this.

BG: Yeah, he does. If he's sincere, he can crack down. He can. He has the power to do the testing and say, "You've tested positive and I'm going to give you guys 60 days or 90 days to clear this stuff out of your system, I'm going to give you a rehab program and psychological counseling and the whole deal. If you get caught on the next test, you can say you'll get a \$5,000 fine, 30 day suspension or something. If you get caught on the third test, you're out of it for good." He can lay down some serious rules and adhere to these rules and regulations and be serious.

WP: But he's not.

BG: But he's not. Evidently, so far, he's not. With all this bad PR coming out and this publicity, it may force his hand even further to do something about it. Time's going to tell on that one.

WP: When was the last time you spoke to him?

BG: Vince tried to contact me in late August regarding the lawsuit. He called Dave Meltzer and asked Dave Meltzer for my home phone number. Dave called me and told Vince that he had to call the man to see if he wants to give you his home number. So Meltzer called me and I said, "No, Vince doesn't need my home number, but I'll give him my lawyer's home number." Meltzer relayed this message to Vince and Vince, the next thing he did was try to contact me through the attorney... (but nothing was arranged).

WP: If you did meet with McMahon, what do you think he would have said to you?

BG: I think he would have said, "What are you trying to do to me? You're family." That's his thing with all the wrestlers that have been with him for some time, he calls them his family. You're part of my family. We've been so good to you and why are you trying to do this to us. Maybe he would have offered me a penance. Let's just settle this. I'll give you so much amount of money and forget it. But he would have tried to throw the guilt trip on me the first thing, the family stuff. It wouldn't have worked.

WP: It was last year that Ed Gantner committed suicide. His downfall was connected to steroids. Is anyone listening? Is it going to take a major superstar's death for people to get the message?

BG: I know, I know. That's the thing. The psychological addiction overrides rationale and being rational about this thing. You're so addicted to steroids that you're not thinking correctly. You're judgement is impaired definitely. People are not getting the message. They're not getting the message about my injuries. They don't get the message about Gantner. They don't get the message about Alzado, whether or not it is steroid related is debated. No, people do not get the message, because they don't think it will happen to them. They don't think it will happen to them. Like I said, it's too much of an addiction. It's too much of a high, too much satisfaction off it to not take steroids.

WP: So is there an answer?

BG: I don't know what the answer is. I really don't. It's pathetic. I've often thought about that. People do not, my peers and other people, do not believe my bone joint degeneration is related to steroids. It's a new phenomenon. My doctors sent me an

American Medical Journal report back in the summer. It was about four or five different power lifters who had the same hip problems I had and they sued the drug companies and all settled out of court. This is kind of like a new phenomenon, my injury. I don't know what it will take. I really don't. As a matter of fact, I don't think adults can even be reached. It really has to start with kids, junior high, high school kids. They're impressionable for sure. But once these people are out of college and on their own, they're not going to be... you'll get some who are impressed by it. But as a whole, it's too much to take. They won't absorb it.

WP: How can you tell when someone is on steroids?

BG: It's just the bloat, you have such water retention. You're abnormally large. You have, a lot of times guys break out and have acne problems. Just from the untrained eye, it would strictly be like, "wait a minute, he looks awfully big." You just can't get that big without steroids. It's just impossible. You put a steroid free guy next to a guy on steroids and this guy's going to outweigh him by 50 or 60 pounds and dwarf him. You can't get the muscle pump. You cannot get the size and density unless you're on steroids. There's just no way.

WP: When did you start developing problems?

BG: In '86, they took my hip out. I did not know then that steroids had caused the damage. They told me I needed hip replacement and I thought it was the trauma of falling. I said, "Put a hip in. I'm going to keep on wrestling." They did. It wasn't long after that, in '89, my ankles were bothering me so bad that I couldn't travel to the airports. I went to a doctor and they looked at my ankles. They operated on me in '90, February and fused that right ankle and they said it was definitely steroids. When I found that out, I went back to my hip doctor and said, "They feel steroids did this damage to my ankle. What about my hip?" And they said, "Yes, now it's concrete, conclusive that steroids caused this and dissolved the joints." What it did was, it cuts the blood supply, prolonged steroid abuse, to the joints and your ankles and your hips have extremely small blood vessels and capillaries, almost the smallest in your body. Those clogged up with plaques and shut off the blood supply. When there's no blood in the blood supply in the joint, the bone dies. It just crumbles up. It looks like cauliflower. It's just horrible. That's exactly what happened. I didn't find that out until 1990, February 1990.

WP: When you first went into the hospital, this wasn't even a consideration, it was due to steroids?

BG: No. I didn't have a clue. I thought it was falling all those years. Other wrestlers have had hip problems.

WP: Lou Thesz.

BG: Yes, Lou Thesz has a piece in there. But then, after I went back and asked them, they concurred that the hip was destroyed so bad. They suspected it at the time. They may have been suspicious, but it was not confirmed. But after the ankle went and my ankle was so horrendously, deteriorated, that they said they'd never seen an ankle that looked like that in their careers. The thing is, both ankles went at the same time, which is another rare thing to happen. They want to fuse my left ankle, but I'm not going to go for that just yet because my right ankle being fused, they had to take all the dead bone out of the ankle joint and the right leg is shortened. They had to take good bone from the shin and my right hip and put it in my right ankle and fuse it. It's very hard walking. My stability and mobility has been dampened.

WP: So you've got limited mobility.

BG: Terribly limited. Very clumsy getting out of a chair. Your ankle doesn't bend. It's hard to bend over. It's very, very hard walking off a curb. Your ankle doesn't bend. It affects you walking up an incline. You have to lean into it. You have to really adapt.

WP: How would your career have changed without steroids?

BG: I would still be wrestling. I know that. I'm 48 now and I feel I'd still be wrestling. Ever since '86, my hip operation, I started having hip problems in '85, but I didn't know what it was. I was being hampered as early as '85. It started affecting my wrestling ability. So it cheated me out of the last five years that I could have been wrestling. Actually '84, I was having problems with my hip, but I didn't know what it was.

WP: What's the status of your lawsuit?

BG: They have filed what they call a writ of intent in Philadelphia. I think they have a 90 day grace period to actually file from the date of the writ of intent. That's closing up now. They will be officially filing soon. In fact, an attorney who just joined the fight in this thing recently in Philadelphia, told me that in the next month or two, there will be subpoenas issued for people to appear at depositions, so things are starting to move on that.

WP: Who can we possibly see subpoenaed?

BG: I don't know. I don't know other than the drug companies. I don't know who they're going to subpoena. It will be interesting to see who gets subpoenaed. It really will. When they're trying to sue the WWF and Zahorian, maybe they're going to subpoena Vince and ask him some questions. It may be possible. I don't know at this point.

WP: Looking back at the steroid abuse, you probably don't think it was worth it.

BG: No way. Never, never, never do it again if I had it to do all over and knew the end result. I would say, "No thank you. I cannot do it." The pain and agony it's cost me and for the rest of my life, the tradeoff is not even close to being equal. The tradeoff is far from being equal. No way would I do it again.

WP: What are you hoping to get out of all this? Are you trying to make people aware?

BG: Make people aware and affect the young people because young people can be influenced. My peers and other people that are adults, they're going to make up their own minds, more or less, what they want to do. But young people are still impressionable. So I'm hoping, by speaking out, I can show the young people my injuries and what could possibly be down the road for them. Maybe I could prevent a lot of young kids getting psychologically addicted and having other problems themselves.

WP: Anything else you want to add?

BG: No, I think it sounds pretty good. It's been my pleasure.

Sidelines

Thanks To James MacArthur for helping put this issue together and to Rodney Leighton and Ron Lemieux for the plugs.

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Scholars and The Squared Circle

By - Patrick Jones

'Can you imagine the level of a mind that watches wrestling?'

- Frederick the artist, from Woody Allen's Hannah and Her Sisters

If professional wrestling is looked down upon by mainstream popular culture, then one can only shudder at what the intellectual community, people like Frederick, thinks of it. Nonetheless, there have been several scholarly studies conducted about professional wrestling. In addition to over 30 articles and one book appearing in the scholarly literature, there have been seven advanced studies in the form of theses or dissertations from the academic community. Each of these approaches wrestling in a different manner and thus reached different conclusions.

The symbolic nature of wrestling certainly lends itself to study. The very simplicity of wrestling (good vs. evil) is the reason for the complexity of the study. The writers of some of these works, it seems, didn't set so much to study wrestling, as to use it as a verification of a methodology. Like wrestling then, the studies are rigged by a desire to prove a point. Unfortunately for the lay reader, this approach makes some of these studies difficult to understand as terms like "Goffmanin frame" are introduced. The nature of academic writing is often to set up the cutter/the methodology, the run the dough/case study through it and see how it comes out.

Michael Ball's "Ritual Drama in American Popular Culture: The Case of Professional Wrestling" (University of Nebraska, 1989) is a good place to start. Not only is it one of the most recent and most successful studies (it was turned into a monograph in the *Mellen Studies of Sociology* series), but it represents the academic approach. The title gives it away - "case study." Wrestling is run through the wringer of the "critical dramaturgy" of Mary Jo Deegan (the thesis advisor), as well as the theories of Victor Turner and Erving Goffman to describe the wrestling as ritual. Ball conducted primary research by attending

matches (WWF), watching television wrestling (including the AWA) and interviewing a former wrestler (Jack Pesek). Ball concluded that today's wrestling presents "cliched stereotypes corresponding to contemporary social problems."

Lee Benaka's "Of Mats and Men: Ritual and Religious Imagery in Professional Wrestling" (Columbia University, 1991) is similar in some ways to Ball. Benaka is also looking at ritual, but he is more focused, concentrating on the Wrestlemanias for his study. With this approach, Benaka examines the main matches from each Wrestlemania and rather than giving them stars, he looks for religious imagery. For example, Benaka explains King Kong Bundy's blading at Wrestlemania II as Bundy's, "paying for his heinous deeds through spilt blood, visceral pain. The high priest, Hulk Hogan presides over this atoning sacrifice, spilling blood with authority. The audience celebrates as justice is served and the order of the Universe restored...Hulk Hogan becomes a resurrected demi-god who has the power to take a life and spill blood." Benaka is looking for the bridge between the wrestler's action and the spectator's reaction, finding it in the way which wrestling appeals to common myths, shared images or even Biblical stories (Hogan/Andre as Abel/Cain).

Steve Beverly's "A History of Professional Wrestling: A Television Programming Form, 1941 - 1989" (Auburn University, 1989) is the most readable of all these. Beverly, editor of *Matwatch*, has a much different approach than the others. First, Beverly knows, while others talked about the "real vs. worked" issue. Beverly, being an insider, has more insight. Second, Beverly's study is primarily a history rather than a cutter-dough job, thus is more readable (he's been reprinting excerpts in *Matwatch* and written about publishing it in book form). Like his newsletter, Beverly's main concern is wrestling as television, not wrestling as ritual, spectacle or anything else. But like the other scholars, Beverly looks deeper, arguing that it is the same elements which make successful television, like "character development and soap operatic elements" which have made television wrestling successful. A well done study that hopefully will find a larger audience when/if published in another form.

James Collins' "Rip His Arm Off and Feed It To Him: A Discussion of Professional Wrestling." (Florida State university, 1982) is a popular culture study. That is, Collins is looking at the most basic of questions: What is wrestling? Why is it popular? What does that mean? Collins, like others, will see wrestling strikes the chords of ritual and myth, but more than that, he examines the aspects of American culture which "allow" for wrestling's popularity. He adopts the outlet thesis (the next writer will as well) that because wrestling is a work, because it is a moral allegory and because it is a communal ritual spectators feel no guilt, thus "some degree of catharsis is almost an inevitable result of every wrestling match."

John Kingsmore's "The Effect of Professional Wrestling and a Professional Basketball Contest Upon Aggressive Tendencies of Spectators." (University of Maryland, 1968) is the earliest full study I can locate. It is not very useful - Kingsmore conducted an experiment on basketball and wrestling fans before and after witnessing contests to determine if the event made people more or less aggressive. It would be interesting to conduct this study now to see if the results would be different. We all know wrestling provokes an emotional response, but does it provide an outlet or a booster for aggressive feelings? Some later studies, however, suggest television violence (which wrestling certainly is a part of) has a negative impact upon viewers, especially children.

Alan Turowetz's "An Ethnography of Professional Wrestling: Elements of a Staged Contest." (McGill University, 1974) is the first of many publications about wrestling from Turowetz. He is a sociologist whose purpose is to look at wrestling from that context. The best thing about this work is Turowetz's dismissal of the "real vs. worked" issue writing "the issue of whether or not wrestling is fake is sociologically irrelevant compared to the issue of what being a wrestler means and what a wrestler does." In his later

writings, Turowetz investigates the former, concentrating on wrestling characters. The contribution is simple: appreciate and study wrestling for what it is, rather than what it is not/claims to be.

Finally, Mark Workman's "Different Perceptions of a Dramatic Event." (University of Pennsylvania, 1977) provides further interpretation into the meaning of wrestling matches. Workman is working from the perspective of a folklorist, thus he sees wrestling as a type of folklore: a mix of myth, truth, fable, tradition and exaggeration. Workman not only watched matches, but also interviewed people involved in the industry. Like others, he doesn't seem concerned with the "real vs. worked" issue, treating wrestling like one would a work of art: open for interpretation.

So what to make of all this? First, none of these studies condemned wrestling as an evil force in the culture as one might think. Second, with the exception of Steve Beverly, none of the writers have much insight into the industry itself. A study of wrestling as a business (Turowetz does a little of this) would certainly be in order. Third, all the authors seem in agreement that it does not really matter, either for the enjoyment or the study of professional wrestling, if it is real or worked. Finally, all of these writers seem to have, if not a love for wrestling, then a respect for both the wrestler and the spectator. As we all know, while wrestlers get little respect, wrestling fans get even less.

An Interview With Jim Duggan

With the Royal Rumble held in Albany, only five minutes from me, I wrote a story about the event for the newspaper I work for. Roger Gaul of the WWF suggested I interview Jim Duggan since he grew up about an hour north of Albany in Glens Falls. Duggan was very pleasant and an interesting person to interview. Overall, I was left with the feeling that he is a good-natured guy. I spoke with Duggan on January 7, 1992, and discussed his high school, college and pro football careers, wrestling, steroids and more. While portions of this interview are obviously worked (and others less obvious), this interview serves as an example of how a WWF wrestler currently deals with the mainstream media. The following interview is printed courtesy of The Record Newspapers, Troy, New York.

- David Skolnick

David Skolnick: How did a guy from Glens Falls get involved in professional wrestling?

Jim Duggan: I was born and raised in Glens Falls. My family still lives there. My father was chief of police for 23 years and a policeman for 43 years total. I went to Glens Falls High School. Originally St. Mary's Academy and then went over to Glens Falls High. I played football at Glens Falls. When I was at Glens Falls, I won the state heavyweight wrestling title in 1973. I still have the high school shot put record to this day, which I set back in '73. I was heavily recruited by many colleges to play football. I finally decided on SMU. While I was down there, I met a promoter by the name of Fritz Von Erich, who suggested maybe trying professional wrestling. I was quite intent on playing football. I went over to the Atlanta Falcons, I got a knee injury that required two knee operations, so they released me. I went up to the Canadian League and played with the Toronto Argonauts and realized that this wasn't where I really wanted to be in my career. So I went back with Fritz and stated in professional wrestling.

DS: So you worked Texas for a while?

JD: For a very short time and then I came up and I was working, it wasn't the WWF at this point. I don't know what they called it.

DS: The WWWF.

JD: Vince Sr. was running the business. I think he saw some potential in me and suggested I learn more about becoming a wrestler and come back to work for him when I had it down. So after about six or eight years of bouncing around the country, I felt I was up to snuff to make the move to the WWF. When I got up here, things had taken off pretty good.

DS: I know you worked for the UWF for while.

JD: Yeah, I was with the UWF for five years. I had a real nice career down there and enjoyed the south. I always wanted a chance to come back home. I wanted to come home with my wife. We live in Florida now, but Glens Falls is still home. My dad and my sisters always come home for Christmas. I get home for five days Christmas time and spend the holidays with them and my friends from high school.

DS: So who actually trained you? Was it Fritz?

JD: I guess Fritz. Professional wrestling, at least the way I get it, there really isn't anybody there to help you out. I found professional wrestling to be more competitive than anything else. There's only a certain 20 to 30 top professional wrestlers in the country making a good living, maybe 50 here in the WWF. Where in contrast, you have hundreds of football players, thousands of baseball players. The competition in wrestling is extreme. There is no one there to help you out. You have to learn it for yourself. Fritz gave me the opportunity to get in the ring. It took me a few years to develop my professional style, even though I had an amateur background. It's much different in the pro ranks. I was state heavyweight champ in '73. It was the first time anyone from our school, Glens Falls High, had ever won. I think at that point, I was the first winner from Section II, which is in the Albany area.

DS: So I guess it's been a love of yours for a while.

JD: I've always enjoyed wrestling. It's something that I've always had a natural aptitude for. Just one on one. In football, you've got your helmet, shoulder pads. You're way out in the middle of the field with 10 other guys surrounding you. Up in wrestling, you got high boots and short shorts, standing out there in front of thousands of people. It's a tough transition and I don't think that many people succeed at it. That's why you see the cream of the crop in the WWF.

DS: You started there four years ago?

JD: I came in right before Wrestlemania III, which had the record setter that they had in Detroit. So this will be Wrestlemania VIII. This will be my sixth Wrestlemania.

DS: I know you won the first Royal Rumble.

JD: First Royal Rumble in Canada. A big day for me. I had a chance to showcase what Hacksaw Jim Duggan could do. I had just really come up into the WWF and didn't have that opportunity to show the world what was possible. I remember it vividly. The last man in the ring was the One Man Gang, before he became Akeem. We battled tooth and nail. We were going to blow the roof off the building. It was an exciting match. I was the last one in the ring. It was a thrill I'll never forget,

DS: The hometown crowd will probably be in your favor.

JD: Jeez, I hope so. I've wrestled at the Knickerbocker before. It's just like coming home. You get a lot of folks from Glens Falls and the surrounding area to come down. Even folks in Albany get excited. When I go all over the country, all over the world, I tell people I'm from Glens Falls, nobody knows where that's at. But I say Albany and

everyone goes, "Oh, I know where that is." So it's really a thrill to wrestle in front... I think it will be an advantage, because you see the advantage on the football field. Now with the playoffs, everybody wants that home field advantage. I think it's a plus to have that home arena advantage.

DS: How do you prepare for an event like that?

JD: Well, I don't think you can prepare for it much differently than you would for a normal competition. You still have to do your weight training. You still have to do your cardiovascular type training. You want to stay in shape. But in actual moves, you might try to have more strength. Some people would try to get a little heavier. Eat a little more than normal because the object is to stay in the ring, not to be thrown out of the ring. So I know myself, I can cut weight. I'm probably 290 now. I could probably cut down to 285, 280 and be lighter and lose strength. So if I go up to 300, 305 pounds, not only will I be heavier, but I'll be stronger.

DS: Who are some of the favorites (at the Rumble)?

JD: Hulk Hogan will always be a favorite anywhere in the WWF. Ric Flair's in there. All the top WWF stars. I think Sgt. Slaughter's going to be in there. The main, big thing is the winner of the battle royal, or the Royal Rumble, gets the WWF title. So that's what it's all about. That's got the wrestlers excited. As in any sport, the world's champion is the top man on the totem pole and everybody else is trying to knock you off. So this is an opportunity for even an average wrestler in the WWF to have an opportunity to get the WWF title without having to go through the whole list of contenders.

DS: You mentioned Flair, how would you see him as champion?

JD: Flair? I think he would have the aptitude to be a good champion. He's a well versed wrestler, maybe one of the best technical wrestlers in the sport today, if not the greatest technical wrestler in the WWF. But in the Royal Rumble, you can take that technical wrestling book and throw it out the window. It's a fight and it's a rumble. A guy like myself has a better chance because it's a brawl. Like I say on my TV interviews, "It there's something out there that moves, you hit it." You don't have any friends out there, so you don't ask for any help and you're not going to give any help. It's a dog eat dog experience.

DS: You sound so incredibly different than what I hear on TV.

JD: Well, I think a lot of people have the wrong impression. They watch professional wrestling on TV and form an opinion there. I think, as in anything, once people come to the show, once they come and see the excitement and see the atmosphere, it's a great night out. I think most of the people say, "Well, I've seen wrestling, but never seen it live," and once they go, it's always, "Hey, that was a great night out." It's an exciting night for the fans and I know all the boys are geared up for the title shot.

DS: I know that you do weight lifting...

JD: Sure.

DS: And I know that you recently won a steroid free weight lifting contest a few months back. What are your feelings on steroids?

JD: It's always tough for a big guy because everybody assumes you take shortcuts. I work real hard. I go to the gym, I pump iron. I'm out there sweating. There's always two or three guys standing in the corner suggesting something about steroids. I look over at them and say, "Hey, get out of the corner and stop talking and get over here and start working out, you'll get developments too." I think legitimate, hard working bodybuilders are getting a bad rap. I don't think steroids are that big of a problem. I think the majority of they guys, it's not steroids, it's hard work.

DS: And what about the policy? The new testing?

JD: The new WWF steroid testing policy is super, especially for a guy like me who worries about losing weight more than gaining weight. I have trouble keeping my weight down. I can jump up to 320, 325 and be sloppy, but enjoy myself. I think it's good that there's one set rule for everybody and I believe that other sports groups should look at our policy because the Olympic Committee is testing us. They make sure it's done properly, no question. I think you will see the WWF with a clean bill of health. A lot of people out there owe us apologies.

DS: Billy Graham and Bruno Sammartino say that 90 percent of you guys are on steroids.

JD: Sure, they don't know 90 percent of the guys. They weren't here when 90 percent of these guys were wrestling. This is a whole brand new generation of professional wrestlers. That's why arenas are packed, that's why people feel the excitement. It's not those old guys out there bellyaching about how things were in the past.

DS: All the problems that we're hearing about are being blown out of proportion?

JD: Oh sure, we've got our problems, like any cross section of society. Look through the police departments. There are problems there. You look at newscasters. There are problems there. Sure, we've got problems, but Vince McMahon and the WWF are doing everything they can to help us out and straighten it out. I think they should be commended on that. Not too many people want to hear that. Everybody wants to hear the negative stuff. But there are a lot of positive things here.

DS: A lot of negative things have been discussed lately.

JD: That's just the way the media is. That's the way our society is. No one wants to hear about the good things, just the negative stuff.

DS: Jim, do you want to add anything else?

JD: Well Dave, the main thing is I'm going to appreciate being there. It's Sunday, January 19. I know the Knickerbocker's going to be rocking. I just hope to see a lot of Hacksaw Jim Duggan fans. I know a lot of folks from Glens Falls are coming down. I know when I go through the airport in Albany, a lot of folks are pulling for me. I tell you, you want to talk about home court, home arena advantage, I think I'm going to have it. I won the Royal Rumble before and I think I can win it again, tough guy! Hoo! I'm started to get fired up, Dave. I tell you it's getting close. It's a big night for me and it is for everybody. We're really pumped up.

DS: It doesn't take too much to get you fired up.

JD: Well, I'm just like anybody else. It's the way I make my living and when I strap my helmet on, I'm ready to go to work.

DS: Where did you get the Hoo! and the "tough guy" from?

JD: Tough guy is something I got from my dad. Anytime you got in trouble, he'd say, "Oh, you're a real tough guy." He was a cop for so long. In professional wrestling, I hear a lot of people tell me what they're going to do to me. So I say, "Yeah, yeah, you're a real tough guy aren't you?" And the 2 by 4 is just kind of the way Hacksaw Jim Duggan is. A meat and potatoes kind of guy. I'm not going to use nothing fancy. I have no sequin ring jacket. I just go down there with a plain old 2 by 4 and do my job. It's some kind of trademark. I'm glad. This way, people know it's me coming when they see it up in the air.

DS: Well thank you Jim.

JD: Nice talking to you.

Letters To The Editors

Your story on the Apter mags was excellent. After I received my first *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* and my eyes were opened to the world, I would go back and read an old issue of *Inside Wrestling* just to see what it said. I went through all the emotions regarding the Apter mags. First, anger; how could they flat out lie to us like they did? Second, humor; their explanations and quotes get funnier every time I read them. Finally, acceptance; they are harmless and should be read with a grain of salt. The photography is top notch and at least I got to see what stars from other areas look like. I still will occasionally pick up an issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* when I am bored, if only to laugh when they say things like Sid Justice is a 'talented wrestler' and Hulk Hogan is the "Wrestler of The Year..." funny stuff.

Paul Nucci
Ypsilanti, MI

In regards to your essay on the Apter mags, I've subscribed to them for years and find them very entertaining. They provide photography, which sheets like the *The Wrestling Observer Newsletter* and *Pro Wrestling Torch* can't provide. Plus, they are generally well-written as far as fiction goes. They do a good job of kayfabe and maybe if the promoters did as good a job, we wouldn't see arena attendance at an all-time low.

Tim Whitehead
Johnson City, TN

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